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PROOFREADING IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EVIDENCE RELATING
TO CORRECTORS OF THE PRESS AT WORK
IN PARIS PRIOR TO 1500

BY

DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE



GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

CONDÉ NAST PRESS

1921

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PROOFREADING IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

PROOFREADING in the fifteenth century was far different from what it is to-day. The earliest printers seldom had a corrector as a member of their shop staffs. The printers themselves were generally highly educated men and revised their own proofs. When they called on outside assistance they enlisted the co-operation of some of the most renowned scholars of the day, who were interested in the newly discovered art because of its potency in the encouragement and dissemination of learning.

The role of textual editor was usually combined with that of corrector of the press. Consider the procedure in printing for the first time one of the standard Latin classics. The text had been handed down by being copied from time to time by various scribes. Each time a manuscript was copied it suffered corruption and error to a greater or less degree. So the printer had often available a dozen manuscript versions of the same text, each differing from the other. To trace the variations back to the most dependable sources and establish as copy an authoritative version was a feat involving considerable diligence and scholarship. It was usually the man who performed this editorial work that later revised the proofs.

Many of the problems of the modern proofreader were never encountered. Punctuation marks were few in number and used according to no consistent style. There were no rules for the division of words, the early printers breaking for a new line at almost any point that suited their convenience. There was usually only one size of type, and as the office generally possessed a single alphabet only, there were no wrong font letters to watch for.

There were no italics or small capitals to match any

roman or gothic font, and thus no uniformity to observe in their use. Capitalization followed no fixed usage, even proper names being set with lower case initials in the great majority of instances. The one feature that makes fifteenth century composition look complicated to us is the extensive use of the Latin contractions. But these were well known to the scholars of the time.

It was only when the products of the presses became more numerous, and when hundreds of works, good, bad, or indifferent, were turned out, that a printing office employed a corrector as a member of the regular staff. This reader is generally pictured in illustrations of early printing offices as a learned individual working next to a book-case, which was presumably filled with reference volumes.

To gain some idea of the role of corrector of the press in the fifteenth century, we may examine the references to proofreading in books printed in Paris before 1500. As might be expected the data is scattered and fragmentary, but it throws considerable light on the scope of the function, and the character of the men who performed it. This review is made the easier by the completion of A. Claudin's monumental work, the *Histoire de l'Imprimerie en France* (Paris, 1900), to which authority I wish to make cordial acknowledgement of obligation.¹

The first corrector of the press in France was a distinguished person indeed, Jean Heynlin, who was surnamed de La Pierre (*de Lapide* or *Lapidanus*) because he was born at Stein, a village between Borzheim and Bretten in the grand Duchy of Baden, which

- ¹ Other helpful works on early Paris printing are:
ANDRÉ CHEVILLIER. *Origine de l'imprimerie de Paris*, dissertation historique et critique. Paris, 1694.
W. P. GRESWELL. *Annals of Parisian typography*. London, 1818.
M. A. TAILLANDIER. *Résumé historique de l'introduction de l'imprimerie à Paris*. Paris, 1837.
MAITTAIRE. *Historia typographorum aliquot Parisiensium vitas et libros complectens*. London, 1717.

place name translated into French became La Pierre. In 1452 he studied at the University of Leipzig. In 1459 he is found at Paris, regent at the Collège de Bourgogne. On June 18, 1462, he was admitted as a fellow (*socius*) of the Sorbonne. Leaving France in 1463, he went to Basle and there received the next year the degree of Master of Arts. He appears on the register of the University as *Magister Johannes Heynlin de Lapide Theologie Baccalarius*.

On returning to Paris in 1467, he was made Prior of the Sorbonne, but resigned this office because of difficulty with his eyes, which had troubled him for a long time. The same year he was raised to the dignity of Rector of the University, and on March 25, 1470, was re-elected Prior of the Sorbonne.

Jean de La Pierre was, according to Claudio, a great lover of books, and had been in touch with the printers of Mainz and of Rome. He numbered in his private library some books of the first presses. Desirous of making available to the students and professors at Paris the advantages of the new invention of printing, which permitted the multiplication of correct texts in place of defective and variant copies written by careless or ignorant scribes, he conferred with one of his most eminent colleagues, Guillaume Fichet, professor of rhetoric and literature, who gave him unqualified encouragement.

The two enthusiasts resolved to bring some printers to Paris, and La Pierre was charged with responsibility for finding some capable workmen in his own country—Germany. The first recruit was Michel Friburger, of Colmar in Alsace, a master of arts, formerly a fellow student with La Pierre at the University of Basle. There were also enlisted two workmen: Ulrich Gering and Martin Crantz. These three arrived in Paris in the early months of 1470 and established the first printing office in France.

The first type was a large round roman said to be chosen in preference to the gothic letter which was then

in general use in Paris, in deference to the defective eyesight of the man who was to revise the proofs.

The first book printed at the Sorbonne press was a collection of letters by Gasparino Barzizi, noted for their elegant latinity. La Pierre sent the proofs to Fichet, who replied with a letter which was printed as a sort of preface to the volume. This letter, which is reproduced herewith, may be translated rather freely as follows:

Guillaume Fichet, Doctor of Theology, of Paris; to Jean de La Pierre, Prior of the Sorbonne; Salutation:

You have sent me the edifying letters of Gasparino of Bergamo. Not only have you diligently revised their text, but they were neatly and accurately reproduced by your German printers. Gasparino should be grateful to you indeed for your vigilant care to have them perfect and ungarbled. And in addition, all learned men should thank you not alone for applying yourself to the study of "sacred letters" as you would designate them, but also for rendering distinguished service in re-establishing in their purity the texts of the Latin authors. This is a task worthy of a man as erudite and as excellent as yourself, who have presided with applause and honor over the learned contests at the Sorbonne and who by your diligence have shed a light over Latin literature, which had been enshrouded in darkness by the ignorance of our age. More serious than several other great injuries done to literature was the injury caused by bad copyists, which made texts almost unintelligible. But now I rejoice exceedingly that as a result of your thoughtful care this plague is being banished from Paris. For the book craftsmen whom you brought to this city from your own country, Germany, have produced books that are faithful to the copy before them and you yourself have never allowed them to print a book until you had collected many manuscripts and had made numerous corrections in the text. Wherefore you richly deserve the praise that was bestowed upon Quintilius, the critic of poetry, of whom Horace speaks, for you have rendered faithfully Gasparino's lovely language and have inspired in most of the noble spirits of this city a contempt for barbarism and have permitted them to taste a fountain of eloquence—like milk and sweeter than honey—of which they drink every day

with increasing eagerness. I repeat, without flattery, what Plato said in praise of Aristotle, "Thy house is the dwelling of a diligent reader."

Farewell. Value me as one who loves you. Written at the Sorbonne by Fichet in his most rapid hand.

The second book printed at Paris was a Latin *Orthography*, also by Gasparino and, like the first volume, again corrected by Jean de La Pierre. The corrector added at the end a short treatise of his own on punctuation. A short while later the *Rhetoric* of Cicero was printed, the text for this being edited and divided into chapters by La Pierre. It is known that he also performed the same service in connection with the printing meanwhile of the text of Valerius Maximus, no copy of which has survived. With the appearance of the *Tusculanae Quæstiones* of Cicero, another corrector appears to have taken over the work formerly assigned to La Pierre at the press of the Sorbonne. The new incumbent of this office was Erhard Windsberg. Chevillier in his *Origine de l'Imprimerie de Paris* notes that he was a German, a medical student, and a friend of La Pierre and the three printers. He later returned to Germany and we learn from a letter dated 1486 that he had become a doctor of medicine. Windsberg was given to writing comments in verse at the end of the various books which he corrected. His first metrical commentary appeared at the close of the volume of Cicero already referred to. It was addressed to lovers of Cicero and asks recognition of the sterling services of the printers who produced the book.

At the end of a volume of Latin letters of Phalaris, Brutus, and Crates, this same corrector of the press wrote another verse extolling the art of printing and its exponents at Paris. The Latin text follows:

*Plura licet summae dederis Alemannia laudi
At reor hoc majus te genuisse nihil
Quam prope divinam sunma ex industria fingis
Scribendi hanc artem multiplicans studia.*

*Fælices igitur Michael, Martineque semper
Vivite et Ulrice hoc queis opus imprimitur.
Erhardum vestro et non dedignemini amore
Cui fido semper pectore clausi eritis.*

This may be translated:

Though you have claim to more than our admiration, I do not think, Germany, that you have invented anything greater than this new and almost divine art of writing, which you pursue in the most industrious fashion, and by which are multiplied the tools of learning. May you live ever happy, Michael, Martin and thou also, Ulrich, you who have together printed this book. And continue your friendship for Erhard, who will always cherish your memory in his heart.

At the conclusion of an edition of Juvenal and Persius, we find Erhard Windsberg again expressing himself in verse² relative to the second section of the volume:

*Ecce tibi princeps Satirorum codice parvo
Persius arte nova impressus et ingenuus.
Fælices igitur Alemannois arte magistra
Qui, studia ornantes, fertis in astra gradum.*

This may be translated:

Here is presented to you that premier satirist, Persius, in a small volume produced by a new and ingenious art. Happy, then, Germans, are you who, by this splendid art promotive of learning, are borne up to the stars.

The three printers of German origin later operated a printing office known as the *Soleil d'Or*. When this establishment was in its first location, in the Rue Saint-Jacques, there was issued, in 1476, the first

² I have seen three printed transcripts of this Latin verse, each differing from the other in text though not in sense: (1) Claudio: *Histoire de l'Imprimerie en France*, vol. 1, p. 53 [which I have followed]; (2) Claudio: *The First Paris Press*, London, 1898 (Illustrated Monograph of the Bibliographical Society, No. VI), p. 26; and (3) in the bibliography appended to the last named volume, p. 65.

Bible printed in France. Following the custom of the early Paris books, the colophon appeared in verse, during the course of which it was stated that the work had been most carefully corrected (*correctam vigilanter*).

An interesting proof error occurs in one volume issued by the *Soleil d'Or*, in its second location in the Rue de Sorbonne, operating under the leadership of Jean Higman. The colophon at the end of the first part of a volume of verse by Dominico Mancini gives the date of printing as M.CCC.LXXXIII or 1384, whereas the real date of issue was 1484, one C being omitted. This error recalls another much discussed date, that of the first book printed at Oxford, on which bibliographers are well agreed that an X was omitted making the date 1468 instead of 1478.

An edition of Aristotle's *Morals* proceeding from the same press in 1489 is noted as being revised and annotated by Gilles de Delft, a fellow of the Sorbonne.

¹In 1491, with the press again under the direction of Ulrich Gering, appeared the *Letters of St. Paul* (*Divi apostoli Pauli Epistolæ*), the proofs of which were revised by a corrector designated as Pierre Succuribilis, a name usually rendered in French as Pierre La Se-courable.

Another distinguished French corrector of the press was Guillaume Tardif, a professor in the Collège de Navarre. Like others in his era, he played the triple role of author, editor, and proofreader. He wrote first a grammar, which was the first book printed in Paris containing words in French, and later a rhetoric. On the appearance of the former from the presses of the *Atelier du Soufflet Vert*, several laudatory verses were addressed to the author and the printers. One stanza written by Louis de Rochechouart, Évêque de Saintes, specifically praises the proofreading:

*Lauda et mirare hec impressa volumina lector!
Scripta quibus cedit pagina queque manu.
Venduntur parvo, nec punctum nec littera deficit.
Vera recognovit Tardivus. Ecce lege!*

These lines may be freely translated:

Appreciate, reader, and admire these printed volumes,
to which give way the pages written by hand. Sold for but
little, yet lack they neither point nor letter. Tardif has
accurately revised them. Take and read!

This verse, and another of a similar strain, were repeated in the *Rhetoric* which was written by Tardif, and also appeared at the end of the *Polyhistor* by Solin, which shows Tardif in the role of corrector of a work of which he was not the author.

The *Rhetoric* of Cicero, which was issued by the printers of the *Soufflet Vert* at the same time as this text was published by a rival press, was advertised as being printed neatly, correctly, and in all respects with care (*nitide, terse atque perpolite*).

In the printing office of Jean Higman, in 1492, was produced a *Commentary* in Latin on the eight books of Aristotle's *Physics*. At the end of this volume appears a verse by Josse Clichtoue, of Nieuport, the last two lines of which read:

*Mendam corripui fido comitante Bohemo
(Ut potui) in plumbo si qua relicta fuit.*

A translation of this might read as follows:

I have corrected the text by the aid of my faithful Bohemus, remedying as I was able any defects still existing in the lead.

Claudin reports his uncertainty as to whether this verse indicates that the proofreader was a Bohemian or that Bohemus was his name.

In 1496, Higman became associated with Wolfgang Hopyl. Together they printed an *Arithmetic* by Jourdain Le Forestier, which had two other works as supplements. During this period David Laux of Edinburgh (*David Lauxius Brytannus Edinburgensis*) was their principal corrector of the press. The names of Lucas Vautier de Conti, Guillaume Gontier, Jean Grietan, and Pierre Grisele also appear.

A *Martyrology* printed in 1490 at Paris by Guy

Marchant was edited and revised by Jean Le Munerat, *chantre de la chapelle* of the Collège de Navarre. At the end of the book Le Munerat added a short discourse of his own on the close relation between grammar and music!

At the end of another book written by Le Munerat and produced by Marchant, appears a colophon setting forth that the text had been composed, edited, and put in shape (*advisata seu excogitata atque ordinata*) by the author.

Pierre Le Dru finished printing the end of September, 1495, the first edition of *Gesta Francorum* by Robert Gaguin, but this was very carelessly proofread. In a letter to Laurent Bureau the author complained that it was full of faults; that his unlucky star had led him to a printer (*Ita evenit ut impressorem sinistro sydere adiret*) ill versed in learning (*male de litteris merentem*) and totally indifferent to his interests and reputation (*et sui quidem commodi fameque apprime incurium*).

There appeared later the *Insolubilia* by Pierre d'Ailly, which seems to have been more carefully revised. In the colophon at the end the proofreader is named: Claude Clérard, a Master of Arts, who was stated to have corrected the volume with care and accuracy (*nuper autem insudatione Claudii Clerardi artium magistrorum accuratissime emendatum*).

Le Dru seems to have taken to heart the strictures of Gaguin relative to his inaccuracy for, at the end of the *Libellus Nugarum*, he notes that he and his associate (Étienne Jehannot) are most vigilant printers (*vigilantissimi impressores*), i.e., careful in the revision and correction of their volumes.

The first corrector of the press mentioned as working for the office of Georges Wolff was Gilles de Delft, who edited and revised a Latin edition of the *Ethics* of Aristotle, which appeared in 1493. It will be recalled that this same Gilles de Delft has already been referred to as acting as corrector for the *Atelier du Soleil d'Or*.

In 1494, Wolff brought out the *Summula Pauperum*, which had at the end some verse which heralded the

usefulness of the book and the care taken in its correction. The corrector was Jean Chappus of Bourges.

André Bocard printed in 1500 several patristic treatises under the general title of *Illustrium virorum opuscula*. In a notice to the reader, after commanding his own qualifications as a printer, he claims that the volume had been corrected with mathematical exactitude (*qui tam terse atque ad amissim castigata compressit*), at the same time naming Cyprien Benet (*Cyprianus Beneti*) as having been his corrector of the press (*qui castigatrices manus apposuit*).

Jean Philippe printed in 1500 the first edition of the *Adages* of Erasmus. The corrector, Augustin-Vincent Caminade, is noted in the colophon as having revised the proofs with particular care (*Augustino Vincentio Caminado a mendis vindicatore*).

Regarding the majority of books printed in Paris in the fifteenth century we do not, of course, have knowledge as to their proof revision. It is manifest, however, from the number in which the identity of the corrector is noted in print, and from other instances in which special claims are made for the accuracy of a volume, that proofreading was deemed a function of importance.

Yet considering the qualifications of the learned correctors and printers and the deliberate procedure of manufacture, a surprising number of errors occurred. Still other errors were corrected while a sheet was on press, so that they appear in the early impressions but not in those handled later by the pressman.

In some of the early volumes there are found manuscript corrections practically uniform throughout a number of copies, showing that these pen revisions were made by the printer or publisher prior to issue to the public. The errors so corrected are about evenly divided between misspelling of proper names, dropping out a line from the copy, or setting up instead of the right word another word somewhat similar in sound and number of letters. Straight errors in spelling, where

the sense was clear, were not regarded seriously, for the reason that standards of orthography were not at all rigid at the time, and what was really a compositor's mistake might be looked upon by the reader as just another form of spelling.

In the first book printed at Paris, the *Letters* of Gasparino (*Gasparini Epistolæ*), the name of one of the printers appearing in the colophon was evidently printed incorrectly. In all existing copies the first three letters of the name *Udalricus* are filled in by hand over an erasure in imitation of the type. This is indeed a strange error for a printer to make. Perhaps, however, he could not first decide on the correct transliteration of his name, Ulrich, into Latin form. In three instances in the same volume words are added by hand in the margins and on folio 34a the word *et* is corrected to *est*.³

In the *Orations* of Cardinal Bessario (*Bessarionis Orationes*), the name of the author on folio 1, line 4, is corrected by hand. Other corrections were noted in Fichet's own copy.

In Fichet's *Rhetoric* (*Ficheti Rhetorica*), are the greatest number of corrections made by hand in any book from the first Paris press. In the first hundred leaves, approximately half the book, there are 45 revisions by pen. Of these 17 are corrections of printed words, while 28 are additions of one or more words, generally indicated on the margins.

In the *Tusculanæ Quæstiones* by Cicero there are at least four errors corrected by hand in the verses at the end of the volume, written by the press corrector himself, Erhard Windsberg. The name *Vano* is altered to *Varo*, the name *Marconi* is changed to *Maroni*, and the words *tamen* and *haud* are corrected.

In some copies of the *Sophologium Jacobi Magni*,

³ For the notes regarding hand corrected errors in the early books printed at Paris, I am indebted to A. Claudin's *The First Paris Press*, London, 1898 (Bibliographical Society, Illustrated Monograph No. VI).

uire ad istaz humilitatem non cessabit cogitare
modos et operationes/ verba intentiones / inspi-
rationes / interrogaciones / opiniones magis hu-
miles. et faciet orationes: donec per dei adiuto-
riū et humilez informationē liberet pprialz aiaz
ab elevationē superbie. A qua qui liber est. leui
cer soluit ab alijs peccatis acut publican⁹. Qui
daz ut possint se humiliare portat in mēoria pti
nue oia mala q̄ pmissēt nichil cogitādo & remiss-
ione facta. vt sic percutiant extollentia super-
bie Alij recordant cōtinue de passione christi re-
putando se in sempitēnū debitores. Alij vilipē-
dendo seipsoꝝ pppter quotidianos defect⁹. Alij
per tentationes quas sustinēt et per infirmitatē
et offendentes reperiunt superbiaꝝ. Alij se hu-
miliant et recipiant aliquas gratias a deo Alij
fecerūt sibi familiarē humilitatē per ḡfaz quaz
a deo receperūt . Sed sūt quidāl qui tñ si ad pre-
sens sint sup terrā nō dico ⁊ qui ponis dei se sēp
humiliant. et quanto plura rectifiunt: tanto pli-
se reputat indignos. credēdo q̄ cōtinue crescat
debitū pctōrū eorū. Et hec perfecta humilitas
hec beatitudine. hec est completa victoria. Oh vi-
deris aliquē peruenisse ad altissimā ipassibilita-
tē ne credas q̄ fuerit per altaz viaz qz per istaz
Sancta caritas et sancta humilitas sūt semp si-
mul: et vna exaltat. alia vero exaltatos ne cadat
detinet Alij est contritio: aliud cognitio: et alijs
humilitas Cōtritio est filia ruine eo q̄ homo ca-
dens efficitur contrit⁹: et si ne ppria confidentia
stat in oratione cū laudabili verecundia innix⁹
sup baculo misericordie dei. q̄ baculo expellit ca-

the word *linguis* on the last line of folio 4a is changed to *regnis*, the word *conueniat* on line 7 of folio 29a is corrected to *contineat*, an omitted line of copy is written in at the bottom of folio 187b, the word *inimicus* on line 31 of folio 191a is altered to *inuictus*, and in the second verse of folio 217b *faciunt* is changed to *faciant*.

These notes will suffice to give some idea of the character of the errors considered worthy of manuscript correction.

There still remains to be answered one question regarding fifteenth century proofreading at Paris, and that is, how did the correctors mark their proofs? As but few of the finished books survived we can hardly expect the more ephemeral proof sheets to have been preserved. By good fortune, however, the diligent M. Claudin discovered a page of proof bearing the proofreader's marks, presumed to originate in the press of the *Soleil d'Or* under the administration of Gering and Renbolt. It is printed on one side only of the paper.

This historic proof is reproduced herewith. Beginning at the highest mark in the margin and working down we find the reader has marked in an *e*, called for *si* (the long *s* in combination with *i* being a ligature), indicated an *r*, again marked in the *si*, next called for *u*, then ordered the insertion of the letter *a* (note the form of the caret indicating the point of interpolation), and finally, though not legibly to us, marked in the letter *t*.

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